

Oralene Simmons

Side 1:

She grew up in Mars Hill, Madison County, going to Long Ridge School for three years. There were four classes in one room and so, to obtain a better education, she spent school months with her mother in Asheville, attending the Hill Street School and graduating from Stephens-Lee in 1961.

[18] She joined the Asheville Youth Council for Racial Equality and participated in demonstrations and sit-ins at counters. She put in her application to Mars Hill which was all white at the time.

[24] Her great grandfather was a slave who was seized by contractors and jailed, until the debt was paid on the school building. She thought she should be able to go to that school. She was accepted but not without a fight. (Enclosures) [Jim Anderson]

[37] She married and worked with the Model City Commission on the environmental task force. She interviewed residents in Stumptown finding out what they wanted in a park and recreation center. She worked at the Montford Center and was transferred by the Parks and Recreation board to the Reid Memorial Center. She has been here three years.

[56] East Riverside was a thriving black community - strong and proud. With the redevelopment, homes were purchased and people were assisted in their relocation. The belief that homes would be put back did not materialize and blocks of apartments were built instead. Older people in high-rise apartments are not happy.

[108] Delany was director of Model City Program. Holt worked with the people. (See his tape) [Logan Delany, Larry Holt]

[137] (Her birthday flowers arrive.) She was working with the Montford area. Older people wanted a park where children could play. One resident got ahead of himself and started chopping down trees and was arrested. She worked in the Randolph School with the PTA and was president of the Montford Community Club. [John Childs (not of Kenilworth)]

[169] She was offered a job in recreation (see Kisiah tape) and went back to school for training. She worked in the Livingston Street Center (now called Reid), but when there was an opening went back to Montford.

[184] Athletics is a part of the recreation program, and the sports are determined by the seasons. She has been in the department over 20 years. There are neighborhood tournaments, city and state tournaments. The emphasis is more on fun than competition. Ray has a softball team. (photo with Terrell tape) [Jesse Ray]

[218] She has a daughter in Mars Hill, one child graduated from Chapel Hill as journalist, another is a nurse in Newport, a son has graduated from A.B. State as an engineer and another is a veteran of the Persian Gulf War. Her husband was working with her on the Montford project. They are now divorced. [Kevin, Rhonda, Sheila, Kyle, Namura] [grandchildren: Jonathan, Shemia, Thror, Trasheinech]

[237] Children who have spent their youth at the centers come back to see her. It was hard leaving Montford, and she stops by to say hello to old friends.

[263] The Montford Community is going through changes for the better. People are moving in and working on the beautiful old houses.

[270] When she first came to Reid Center, there was a lot of work to be done - the building had been an elementary school closed with integration. When she returned after two years at Montford, there was more work to be done.

[290] A lounge has been decorated for older people who come every day. The Council on Aging assists with transportation.

[334] All centers are basically alike. She works directly under the Superintendent of Parks and Playgrounds. [Ray Kisiah, Ben Wax]

[350] She considers the centers "tops" compared with other cities. Money is always made available to upgrade facilities. New trees are being planted. Kisiah is excited about his job and is constantly improving programs and buildings.

[411] The center serves children 5 years and up. There are a number of activities, and during the summer the hours are 9-5. The number of staff members fluctuates from 5 to 20 depending on the season. There are a large number of volunteers. Since she lives in the neighborhood, she can call on friends to tutor, coach, teach music and dance and serve on committees. They are currently planning a fair where booths will display information on health, recreation, careers, etc.

[491] Volunteers are recruited through flyers, questionnaires sent home with the children and personal friends. She said "we depend on each other."

[515] A youth coalition is being formed which will act as an outlet for the Martin Luther King, Jr. activities.

[533] A number of organizations meet at the center - the NAACP, the Tenant Association through the Housing Authority, a number of Afro-American clubs, and the overflow from the Building Bridges program (see O.T. Tomes tape).

[585] The Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast is going into its 14th year. She suggested an event to commemorate his birthday; and though she feared it would be too political, was encouraged to go ahead. [Leslie Anderson]

Side 2:

[2/6] She had arranged prayer breakfasts with the senior citizens in the community center, so asked Coleman to help and contacted the Minister's Alliance. The ministers said they would announce from the pulpit but didn't want to sponsor. A charge of \$2.00 to buy the food was charged and 75 people showed up at the Montford Center. It was so successful that by the 5th year when the day was made a state and federal holiday, they dreamed of a nationally known speaker. They knew a larger space would be needed, so patron tickets were sold and the event was held at the Civic Center - they ran out of food and chairs. The breakfasts, now in the 14th year, continue to be held at the Civic Center and other projects are included - a candlelight service, special programs for young people, awards, a peace walk. It has been recognized by the governor who nominated her for the National M.L.K. award. She was honored along with 60 others (she points to picture with Mrs. King). She has been reappointed to serve on the commission, which is now funded, and she will serve as vice-chairman. [Wanda Henry Coleman, Shirley Chisholm, Bob Plemmons, Mrs. Coretta King, Governor Hunt]

[2/78] Funds will be given in the form of grants for activities. Many conferences are patterned after the Asheville plan - this is the oldest.

[2/91] The youth M.L.K awards are given to students who exemplify King's teachings. Those honored go to Raleigh to be honored by the governor.

[2/109] The patron's list (see enclosure) is discussed.

[2/114] The minister's alliance is now very supportive.

[2/127] She gives credit to her grandmother for being a role model and raising her in a Christian home [This is the third black woman who has made this comment - perhaps their mothers were working full-time].

[2/138] The NAACP joined the group in the beginning - endorsing, selling tickets, and taking a full page in the program.

[2/149] Putting the program together is stressful; and the timing, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, means that getting pledge money in in time causes extra tension. [Bill Falk]

[2/169] Committees are large and active. Clubs, organizations and agencies are represented. There is no paid staff. People work at home and come together for meetings.

[2/190] It all started with Parks and Recreation. She was working at Montford at the time and asked for permission from her supervisors. She asked the YMI to be a co-sponsor. Others joined - from labor, Mars Hill, UNCA, two ministers - every year more agencies and volunteers are added. [Phyllis Sherrill, Bob Plemmons]

[2/221] Whole families participated. They put in long hours and are up all night before the day and ready to go at 6 a.m.

[2/238] Food is catered and young people from the high school, who phone to get on the list, are chosen and trained as servers. [Barbara Williams]

[2/256] She discusses changes in society since integration: attitudes and the structure of family life, job opportunities, and drugs. While many blacks have gone from menial labor to college training, too many have low self-esteem, take to drugs and can't find jobs in the area. She is concerned about unwed mothers, violence, and crime.

[2/401] Help for overcoming addiction is available. One does not have to have money to get help, but they must seriously want it. She has seen some success stories.

[2/506] For her next birthday, she would like to be in good health, wind down a little, be more social, and smell the flowers. She has "gone to the mountaintop and would like to start down the other side."